

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Joint Subcommittee Hearing
“Status of Reforms to EPA’s Integrated Risk Information System”

July 16, 2014

Thank you Mr. Chairman. Virtually every aspect of our daily lives is impacted by the use and presence of chemicals. The goal of the Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) at EPA is to provide information to the American people about the risks associated with exposure to certain chemicals. It should be obvious to anyone that information about the health effects of chemical exposures can only benefit the public. Unfortunately, the value of IRIS is too often obscured by the criticisms of those who stand to gain by interfering with EPA’s mission to protect human health and the environment.

The National Academies report released this May praises the substantial improvement made by EPA in addressing issues that had been raised about the IRIS process. Specifically, the report states that if EPA continues on this path of improvement, “the IRIS process will become much more effective and efficient in achieving its basic goal of developing human-health assessments that can provide the scientific foundation for ensuring that risks posed to public health by chemicals are assessed and managed properly.” The report also points out two important future steps which EPA can take to further improve the quality of their IRIS assessments.

First, EPA must continue to expand opportunities for stakeholder input and discussion. The chemical industry is not the only stakeholder in public health assessments. Community groups and public health organizations do not always have the same resources to support meaningful participation in the public processes of IRIS. The EPA must not permit a privileged few to monopolize a process meant to foster open discussion.

Second, EPA should be diligent in developing firm “stopping rules,” that guard against undue delay in releasing its assessments. Hundreds of new chemicals are released onto the market every year with no requirement that their safety be demonstrated. IRIS was created to address this lack of information on the potential toxicity of these chemicals and their influence on human health. Unfortunately, the pace at which IRIS finalizes its assessments has slowed to an unacceptable rate. It is time EPA moves ahead with urgency to bridge this gap and fulfill its mission. I am looking forward to hearing from Dr. Olden on this matter.

It is clear that IRIS provides a valuable service to the American people. We must encourage EPA to be diligent in its efforts for continued improvement, and support them as they implement the recommendations of the National Academies.

Thank you, and I yield back.